

The University of Chicago

PUBLIC LECTURES IN NEW YORK
1851-1878
A CULTURAL INDEX OF THE TIMES

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE
JUNE, 1941

By
ROBERT J. GREEF

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. An Account of the Public Lecture System

An editorial in the New York Tribune of December 18, 1869, begins with the following interesting prediction:

When the historian of a later day comes to search out the intellectual antecedents of his modern society, he will devote an interesting chapter to the rise and progress of ideas as illustrated in the institution of the public lecture. He will record that at one time Emerson, Alcott, Phillips, Beacher, Garrison, and a great many other awakeners of American intelligence, were lecturers; that philosophers and scientists were persuaded out of their studies and laboratories to take a stand on the platform; in short, that Plato's Academe and Archimedes's workshop were turned into the lecture-room.

This prophecy, of course, has not until this time been fulfilled. The student may find passing references to the lecture system,¹ and a few sketchy and inadequate accounts of it.² But he must soon be impressed with the fact that a large area in the cultural and literary picture of the nineteenth century is virtually blank. The following study is a start toward filling in the blank and

¹Cf. James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States, 1850-1877 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1910), III, 89-91; C. R. Fish, Rise of the Common Man, Vol. VI of A History of American Life, eds. A. M. Schlesinger and Dixon R. Fox (12 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927-1938), p. 225; A. C. Cole, The Irrepressible Conflict, Vol. VII in same series, pp. 215-216; Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America, Vol. VIII in same series, pp. 238-240; Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), I, 489-490; II, 97-98; and III, 171-173.

²Cecil B. Hayes, The American Lyceum: Its History and Contributions to Education [Hereafter designated as The American Lyceum], U. S. Department of Interior, Education Bulletin No. 12 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932); Anna L. Curtis, "A Brief History of the Lyceum," Who's Who in the Lyceum, ed. A. Augustus Wright (Philadelphia: Pearson Brothers, 1906), pp. 15-34; Paul W. Stoddard, "The Place of the Lyceum in American Life" (Unpublished Master's essay, Department of Education, Columbia University, 1928).

contributing to the complete view of American literary history.

Since the earliest days of the colonists, public speaking has played an important part in the communication of ideas in this country.³ "The first product of American civilization," Oliver Wendell Holmes declared in his lecture on lecturing, "was a stump." And the first intellectual product, he went on, "was a man to get upon it and make a speech. . . . The stump speaker is the father of American civilization."⁴ However, an organized and prominent lecture system is usually said to date from 1826. In that year Josiah Holbrook, of Derby, Connecticut, in an article in the American Journal of Education,⁵ proposed associations for the "diffusion of useful knowledge." This idea resulted, later in the same year, in Holbrook's founding the Millbury, Massachusetts, No. 1 Branch of the American Lyceum.

Thus began what might be called the American Lyceum period of the lecture system. It lasted from 1826 until approximately 1845. Although this period lies outside the scope of the present study, a few facts about it are pertinent as background to the later system.⁶

During the same season in which the Millbury branch was

³Edward Everett Hale emphasizes this point in his article, "Lectures and Lecturers," Modern Eloquence, ed. T. B. Reed (Philadelphia: John D. Morris, 1900), IV, xiv-xxviii. Writing of the Puritan fondness for public discourse, Hale says, "It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that half of the people who crossed the Atlantic in that year [1630] came because they wanted to hear lectures." The colonists applied the word lecture to their midweekly sermons, which were not always on religious subjects; see Winthrop's Journal or Sewall's Diary. Somewhat later lectures on scientific subjects were common. See William N. Morse, "Lectures on Electricity in Colonial Times," New England Quarterly, VII (June, 1934), 364-374.

⁴"Lectures and Lecturers," Literary World, XI (November 6, 1852), 299.

⁵"Associations of Adults for Mutual Education," October, 1826. Holbrook later expanded his idea and published it in a pamphlet, The American Lyceum (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1829). This is reprinted in Old South Leaflets, No. 139.

⁶For details of this earlier period, see Cecil B. Hayes, The American Lyceum; and Katherine H. Porter, "Development of the American Lyceum with Special Reference to the Mission of the Local Associations in New England" [Hereafter designated as "Development of the American Lyceum"] (Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of English, University of Chicago, 1914). Both have bibliographies.

begun, twelve or fifteen more lyceums were started in near-by towns. In the next two or three years, the idea spread rapidly. On November 7, 1828, Boston founded a lyceum, with Daniel Webster and Edward Everett taking part. The important Essex county lyceum was begun in 1829.⁷ By 1831 the scheme had spread beyond New England,⁸ and on May 4 of that year, a meeting of delegates in New York formed an American National Lyceum. Josiah Holbrook traveled from state to state, as far west as St. Louis, starting lyceums, until in 1835 there were at least three thousand town organizations. Regular annual meetings of the National Lyceum were held in New York on the first Tuesday in May.⁹

Of the lectures given in the early American Lyceum, two observations are relevant. First, the lectures dealt for the most part with problems of education in the common schools. Those which were not concerned with educational methods entirely, were at least intended to be highly instructive.¹⁰ Of course, toward the end of the period, audiences were also drawn by a desire for "entertainment and excitement," as George Combe, the phrenologist, noted in 1838-1840.¹¹ But essentially the intention in

⁷Charles W. Upham, "A Circular Letter Issued Pursuant to the Vote of a Convention . . . for Establishing a County Lyceum," Essex Institute Historical Collections (Salem: Essex Institute Press, 1880), XVIII, 293 ff.

⁸For an account of this growth, see Herbert B. Adams, "Educational Extension in the United States," U. S. Commissioner of Education Reports for 1899-1900 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), I, 285.

⁹A report of each annual meeting except the first is found in the Annals of Education for each year.

¹⁰This point is stressed by Edward Everett Hale, in A New England Boyhood (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1900), pp. 123-124. He writes: "A lecture course is now undertaken by a director, or entrepreneur, who means to provide entertainment for the people. He does not pretend to teach the people; he proposes to entertain them. . . . But in the earlier days of what we called the lecture system, or the lyceum, a body of public spirited men, who really wanted to improve the education of the community, banded themselves together in a society for that purpose. This society . . . established courses of lectures, generally in the winter, for the instruction of the people."

¹¹Notes on the United States of North America During a Phrenological Visit in 1838-39-40 (Edinburgh: MacLachlan, Stewart and Co., 1841), pp. 120-121.

these lectures¹² was "the diffusion of useful knowledge." For this reason, the history of this first period more properly belongs to the field of education.

Second, during the 1830's lecturers in the lyceums were usually local members or amateurs from near-by towns. Out of twenty-three lecturers in the first two years at Salem, for example, only five were not residents of the city; Edward Everett, who came farthest, was from Boston.¹³ Thus, since they had relatively narrow fields, the speakers remained purely amateur lecturers, for whom lecturing was a somewhat unimportant affair. Naturally, few names stand out prominently in this period. Ralph Waldo Emerson, of course, began during these years; and by many he is credited with establishing the lyceum lecture in America.¹⁴ Edward Everett, to whom Emerson himself assigned this honor, was also active. Of him, Emerson wrote in "New England Reformers":

By a series of lectures largely and fashionably attended for two winters in Boston he made a beginning of popular and miscellaneous lecturing, which in that region at least had important results. It is acquiring greater importance every day, and becoming a national institution. I am quite certain that this purely literary influence was of the first importance to the American mind.¹⁵

T. W. Higginson, who also emphasized the fact that there were no professional lecturers in the early lyceum, declared that "one of its leading founders was our great school reformer, Horace Mann."¹⁶ But in the main, the greater number of speakers in the American

¹²This may easily be observed in the titles of lectures listed by Cecil B. Hayes, The American Lyceum, pp. 66-68; see also Katherine H. Porter, "Development of the American Lyceum," p. 14.

¹³Charles W. Upham, "Memoir of Francis Peabody," Essex Institute Historical Collections (Salem: Essex Institute Press, 1869), Vol. IX, Pt. II, p. 50.

¹⁴For example, Old South Leaflet, No. 139, p. 19: "Some one has said that he created a new profession, that of the lecturer; and another has said that he gave to the Lyceum in this country its form and character"

¹⁵Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1891), p. 335.

¹⁶T. W. Higginson, "The American Lecture System," Macmillan's Magazine, XVIII (May, 1868), 52.

Lyceum period were men of slight and merely local reputation.¹⁷

In New York City, while they were not called lyceums, a number of organizations sent delegates to the national meeting. A list of these organizations follows:¹⁸

New York Young Men's Society
 Mechanics' Society, New York City
 New York University
 New York Historical Society
 New York Athenaeum
 General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of New York
 Mercantile Library Association
 Hamilton Literary Association of Brooklyn
 Juvenile Lyceums of the New York Public Schools

But in general, New York in this period seemed less interested in lecturing than were the New England states.

The American National Lyceum continued to function during the 1830's. However, in 1839, after an enthusiastic annual meeting in May,¹⁹ the organization suddenly went to pieces and no more meetings were held in later years. It is hard to account for this decline. Perhaps it was due in part to the fact that Josiah Holbrook, leading spirit that he was, removed in 1837 to Berea, Ohio, to found a Lyceum village. Perhaps, as Cecil B. Hayes has suggested, the organization died because one of its chief aims, the improvement of the common school, had been taken over by other agencies such as state boards of education.²⁰ Perhaps the supply of amateur and local lecturers had been exhausted. At all events, it is clear that by 1845 the American Lyceum period was at an end. Cecil B. Hayes concludes:

The state, county, and town lyceums are known to have continued their work for a few years after 1839, but those which survived after 1845 almost entirely limited their activities to securing a few good lecturers each year to address them.²⁰

Lecturing thereupon entered a brief period of unpopularity. Thus, when R. H. Dana came to New York in 1849 to lecture

¹⁷Edward Everett Hale wrote in James Russell Lowell and His Friends (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), p. 109: "The reader must understand that in the 'Lyceum system,' so called, it was considered as a sort of duty for educated men to have on hand a lecture or two which they were willing to read to any audience which was willing to ask them."

¹⁸Cecil B. Hayes, The American Lyceum, p. 66.

¹⁹Cecil B. Hayes, The American Lyceum, p. 52.

²⁰Cecil B. Hayes, The American Lyceum, p. xii.

on "Literature and the Age," a writer in the Literary World expressed anxiety lest an audience of respectable numbers should not appear.²¹ In the same year, a further indication of the apathy toward lectures is found in a report of a meeting of the Mercantile Library Association in New York:

A member of the Association introduced the business of the evening by stating his fears that all of the promises of the Society respecting lectures might not be redeemed. . . . The popular orators on the occasions had been invited, but had refused, with the exception of Rev. Dr. Bethune.²²

And in the same issue of the Literary World appears the following:

Lectures are becoming unpopular, it is said; and why is it so? Is it not very much because so many of our lecturers belong to a class who are unfit for anything else?²³

A further analysis of the situation is contained in the New Englander of May, 1850. In criticizing recently published volumes of lectures, the writer declares that lyceum addresses have dealt too much with fine-spun topics:

And we justify ourselves for attempting to show it, by the fact, that the interest in popular lectures has to so great a degree subsided within the past few years, that in numberless instances, they have been abandoned altogether; and where they have been sustained, they have been not infrequently, nor perhaps unjustly, regarded as a wearisome infliction upon the patience and judgment of hearers.²⁴

Whatever the causes, the lyceum lecture had apparently no great vogue between 1845 and 1850.

In 1851, however, a new phase began, and platform speaking took a fresh hold on public interest. This phase, the golden age of the institution, might be called the Public Lecture period, and its limits might be set from 1851 to approximately 1878. The lectures of this period are the subject of the present study.

In two respects the new phase differed from the American Lyceum period. First, the lectures were no longer confined largely to educational topics; the range of ideas became as wide as the interests of society itself. Said one observer:

²¹Literary World, IV (February 17, 1849), 169.

²²Literary World, V (November 24, 1849), 438.

²³Literary World, V (November 24, 1849), 442.

²⁴"Popular Lectures," New Englander, VIII (May, 1850), 200. This article is interesting for its scathing remarks on Emerson's Representative Men. Henry Giles' Lectures and Essays is treated very respectfully.

[Lecturing began] with preaching of great social reforms, and the range of topics selected was, comparatively, limited. Now the subjects upon which the lecturer speaks comprise the widest variety, and take the freest range.²⁵

As Walt Whitman exclaimed in an editorial in the Brooklyn Times, "Yet how wide is the range of subjects presented to the industrious and conscientious Lecturer!"²⁶

Second, lecturers were invited from distant cities to make up local courses, and nation-wide reputations were built up. Outstanding speakers, through increased practice, became tremendously effective; and lectures, polished and improved with many deliveries, assumed importance. Lecturing gradually became a profession.

A number of reasons account for the change which took place around 1851. First, it was in part due to the great strides made in railroad building and the accompanying increase in prosperity during the middle of the nineteenth century. New railway lines to the West, throwing open a region anxious to imbibe culture, made it possible for the prophets of the East to appear in person.²⁷ Almost as soon as there were trains to carry them, and while the journeying was still full of difficulties,²⁸ the

²⁵"Lyceums and Lecturing in America," All the Year Round, n.s., V (March 4, 1871), 320.

²⁶Printed in I Sit and Look Out, eds. Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 52.

²⁷For an interesting contemporary view of the effect of railroads on the West, see "Letter from Iowa," Independent, February 10, 1854. T. W. Higginson also traced the rise of the lecture to the growth of the railroad; see "American Audiences," Part of a Man's Life (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1905), p. 73. See also the reference to Oliver Wendell Holmes' adopting a lyceum career, in E. A. and G. L. Duyckinck, Cyclopedia of American Literature (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1856), II, 512: "... thus he carries pleasure and refinement from the charmed salons of Beacon street to the towns and villages in the back districts, suddenly opened to light and civilization by the straight cut of the railroad."

²⁸The chief memories of famous lecturers of these early days seem to have been of the unpleasant difficulties of travel. See especially Horace Greeley's excellent account of his experiences in Indiana and Illinois in 1850, in "Sundry Lecturing Reminiscences," Recollections of a Busy Life (New York: J. B. Ford and Company, 1868), pp. 554-570. See also Phineas Taylor Barnum, Struggles and Triumphs, ed. George S. Bryan (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), II, 625-638. An amusing fictional

lecturers began to acquire national prestige which surely whetted the appetites of even New York audiences.

A second reason for the sudden up-surgings of the lecture system is found in the formation and activities of certain societies interested in the promotion of winter courses. The organization of the American Geographical Society in New York in 1852,²⁹ and of the Young Men's Christian Society in the same year;³⁰ the efforts of the New York Historical Society³¹ and Mercantile Library Society³² to raise funds for new buildings; the new edifice of the Brooklyn Athenaeum in 1853;³³ the opening of the Cooper Union in 1857³⁴--such were some of the agencies which were not only reflections of the growing interest in lecturing, but also the cause of its increased popularity.

A third reason, the one most frequently cited, for the rise of the lecture in the fifties is found in the heightening feeling over anti-slavery reform. This idea was expressed a number of times by George William Curtis; for example, he wrote in 1887:

The singular success of the lyceum lecture of that time [the 1850's] was due, undoubtedly, to two causes--the simultaneous appearance of a remarkable group of orators, and their profound sympathy with the question which absorbed the public mind.³⁵

Another who assigned this same reason for the rise of the system

description of the discomforts of early lecturing is James T. Fields' "A Free-Lecture Experience," Harper's Monthly, LIX (June, 1879), 77 ff.

²⁹Bulletin of the American Geographical and Statistical Society, I (1852), 3-4.

³⁰See Independent, June 3, 1852; "History of the New York Y.M.C.A.," Putnam's Monthly, III (1869), 488 ff.

³¹Times, October 6, 1852; Times, November 4, 1857.

³²Literary World, XIII (September 17, 1853), 127; Tribune, March 9, 1854; Scribner's, I (February, 1871), 367.

³³Times, January 20, 1853.

³⁴For the opening of Cooper Institute, see Allan Nevins, Abram S. Hewitt: With Some Account of Peter Cooper (New York: Harper and Bros., 1935), pp. 269 ff.

³⁵"Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, LXXIV (April, 1887), 824. See also Harper's Monthly, XL (May, 1870), 921.

was Edward Everett Hale.³⁶ Although there is some validity in this explanation, it should not be pushed too far. Indeed, the facts, as they will be developed in a later section, indicate that the tension surrounding the discussion of abolition acted as much to discourage lecturing as to foster it. As a writer somewhat later commented:

The committees of the organizations at first declined, then hesitated, to permit the lecturers to speak upon "irritating" political issues--the most irritating at that time being, of course, slavery. . . . But it would not do. The political speakers were too many and too eloquent to be shut out. The lyceums manifestly drooped.³⁷

A number of the most prominent men on the platform, like Garrison, Sumner, Phillips, and Parker,³⁸ were in fact interested in it merely as a means of denouncing slavery. On the other hand, a large proportion of the most popular lecturers in the early 1850's, such as Holmes, Chapin, Gough, and Milburn, carefully refrained from speaking of abolition. Though the discussion of slavery was responsible for the organization of two important lecture series in 1853-54 and 1854-55, the feeling with respect to abolition also kept some prominent speakers from appearing on more general courses.³⁹ Thus, although aroused public opinion about slavery played some part in the rise of the lyceum lecture around 1851, clearly its importance as a factor must not be exaggerated.

Whatever the reason, the beginning of a new emphasis on lecturing in the early 1850's is evident. A number of contemporary

³⁶"Lectures and Lecturers," Modern Eloquence, edited by T. B. Reed (Philadelphia: John D. Morris, 1900), IV, xxiv.

³⁷"Lyceums and Lecturing in America," All the Year Round, V (March 4, 1871), 319.

³⁸See Edward Everett Hale, James Russell Lowell and His Friends, p. 104: "And the history of the twenty years before our Civil War is not rightly written unless it refers to the effect which was wrought by such speakers. Phillips, Parker, Ward Beecher, and even Garrison, would have been little known outside a small circle around their respective homes but for this lecturing practice."

³⁹For example, Theodore Parker could not appear on any regular lecture course in Boston until the Fraternity Course was started in 1858; of course, the religious issue may have been involved in Parker's case; see John Weiss, Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1864), I, 432. Certainly, the experience of William G. Simms showed that the lyceum was closed to lecturers from the South.

periodicals noted it. For example, the International Magazine for February, 1851:

Thus far, this season, there has been even more than the usual amount of lecturing in our principal cities. The mania lasts longer than was thought possible. The "phenomenon" has really become a feature of the times. It absorbs a great share of the current literary enthusiasm--much of which it has created, and will, it is to be feared, entirely satisfy.⁴⁰

An editorial in the New York Times, March 18, 1852, likewise commented on the increased interest in lectures during the winter of 1851-52. Listing some of the outstanding speakers and criticizing the lack of unity in the courses, the editor demanded a series of "Lectures for the People" in the coming season.

By the fall of 1852, as Henry Ward Beecher remarked in the Independent, public lectures had become "indispensable to every well spent winter."⁴¹ The New York Tribune concluded an editorial on the courses scheduled for the next season by observing "the lecture prospect is more brilliant than ever."⁴² Oliver Wendell Holmes, in an address in the same autumn, declared, "That lecturing has succeeded in establishing itself as a fifth estate, there can be no doubt." And he went on to comment on New York's conspicuous place in the field: "New York is getting, to a great extent, to enjoy the metropolitan luxury of being taster to the country at large."⁴³

The renewed demand for platform entertainment increased, until in January, 1853, a writer in Putnam's stated:

Lectures have become one of the established winter institutions, not in the cities only, but in many of the country towns, both large and small. . . . Such an uprising of listeners has never before been known.⁴⁴

And the Literary World for the same month reflected the same situation:

The "Lecture system" we are told is flourishing again after a little depression in the article. Some years since everybody went to the lectures and any one who could fill a

⁴⁰International Magazine, II (February 1, 1851), 319.

⁴¹Independent, October 28, 1852.

⁴²Tribune, October 19, 1852.

⁴³Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Lecturers and Lecturing," Literary World, XI (November 6, 1852), 299.

⁴⁴Putnam's, I (January, 1853), 106.

copy book from an encyclopedia was sure of a gaping audience.⁴⁵

Finally, by the beginning of 1854, the New York Tribune declared:

As lectures have now attained a rank as a department of literature, constituting no inconsiderable source of knowledge to a large part of the community, they are entitled to some critical notice for the benefit of those who deliver lectures as well as those who hear them.⁴⁶

In surveying this new period of the Public Lecture, one is struck by the fact that contemporary writers in referring to it, rarely used the word lyceum. A writer in Harper's in 1851 gave a hint as to the feeling on this point when he spoke of the "Public 'Lectures,' or the 'Lyceum' as one of the lecturing notabilities not very felicitously denominates the institution. . . ." ⁴⁷ Later in the decade, however, when the original American Lyceum was becoming forgotten, it was more common to refer to the lecture system as the lyceum; by the 1870's, the two terms appear to have been interchangeable.⁴⁸ For convenience in this paper, however, the term lyceum will be used broadly to mean the lecture system in general.

Lecturing continued to grow in vogue. The Tribune predicted that the season of 1854-55 would be "more brilliant than any heretofore . . . more Popular Lectures delivered, and to larger audiences, than during any preceding autumn and winter."⁴⁹ The sharp, short depression of the winter of 1854, and the more serious panic of 1857 seem to have had slight effect in decreasing the number of courses. Indeed, during the first of these "hard times" the demand for lecturers, and consequently their fees

⁴⁵Literary World, XII (January 8, 1853), 23.

⁴⁶Tribune, January 6, 1854.

⁴⁷Harper's Monthly, VI (April, 1851), 703. The rest of this quotation is significant in revealing that in the years before 1851 lectures "had begun to assume a somewhat mythical character in the situation of townsmen, as relics of ages long gone by"

⁴⁸For example, an article in the Tribune, November 4, 1876, is headlined "The Lyceum--System of Public Lectures." An article in All the Year Round, V (March 4, 1871), 317, appears to use lyceum in referring to lectures before the Civil War.

⁴⁹Tribune, September 20, 1854.

rose steadily.⁵⁰ In fact, by 1855 the high remuneration of speakers was beginning to draw comment.⁵¹ The situation was called to public attention by an appearance of Beecher in Chicago in 1855. A speculator having boosted the price of tickets, the Chicago lecture association boycotted in protest. Beecher defended himself stoutly in the Independent,⁵² and the New York Tribune in a long editorial, "The Rights of Intellect,"⁵³ maintained the fairness of the lecturers' receiving higher fees. The feeling that a lyceum speaker should give his services or be content with a small honorarium, was rapidly passing.

This situation led to the next development in the lecture system--the rise of the professional lecturer. As opportunities to earn a respectable income improved, more and more men depended upon the platform for a living. This development was regarded by a number of observers as not altogether desirable. An article in the Independent, commenting on the place of Christian ministers in the lyceum, went on as follows:

Gentlemen of leisure, of scientific attainment and literary culture, or of pretensions to these, now take up lecturing as their profession and put ministers in the shade by flashiness. The demand for lectures has produced an inordinate supply of professional lecturers, some of whom are eminently qualified for this service, while others maintain an itinerant reputation upon small capital, who could not reach mediocrity in a profession requiring more steady labor.⁵⁴

This attitude toward the "mere lecturer," undoubtedly a hold-over from the American Lyceum period, when speakers were gentleman

⁵⁰In Carlos Martyn, John B. Gough, Apostle of Cold Water (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1894), p. 215, is found a list of average annual rates for Gough's lectures, which show the gradual increase from 1843 to 1863.

⁵¹Tribune, October 19, 1855.

⁵²Copied in the Tribune, November 19, 1855. See also Beecher's article defending higher fees for lecturers in the Independent, April 28, 1853.

⁵³Tribune, November 24, 1855.

⁵⁴Independent, November 28, 1854. See also an article from The True Flag copied in Liberator, December 21, 1855: "Lecturing has become no longer a profession for improving the people, as it used to be. It is a paying business, and everyone who has one idea as large as a grain of wheat, hammers it out to an indefinite extent."

amateurs, did not die out easily. Indeed, during the 1860's, Dr. J. G. Holland in his lecture on "The Popular Lecture," observed:

One of the noticeable features of the public humor in this matter is the aversion to professional lecturers--to those who make lecturing a business, with no higher aim than that of getting a living.⁵⁵

After the Civil War, this feeling disappeared to a large extent.⁵⁶ There can be no doubt that in literary quality and in effectiveness of delivery, the long-experienced platform speakers who now appeared were superior to the local men of an earlier day.⁵⁷

The increase of this class of lyceum speakers can easily be traced by studying the lists of those seeking engagements, published each fall in the New York Tribune, 1854-59. These grew from thirty-five lecturers in 1854⁵⁸ and forty-three in 1855⁵⁹ to one hundred and forty-five in 1858⁶⁰ and one hundred and ninety-four in 1859.⁶¹ More and more literary figures, such as Herman Melville⁶² and J. G. Holland,⁶³ to name only two, attempted the

⁵⁵Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland, Plain Talks on Familiar Subjects (New York: Charles Scribner and Co., 1866), p. 313.

⁵⁶See "Popular Lectures," Galaxy, IX (March, 1870), 418; the writer comments on the fact that lecturing is a profession, but without any adverse criticism. Moses Coit Tyler, in "How They Manage Their Lectures in England," Putnam's Magazine, XIII (January, 1869), 99, points out that one great difference between England and America is that lecturing is "a respected profession" in the latter.

⁵⁷Henry Ward Beecher stresses the necessity and benefit of long experience on the platform for successful lecturing, in his article, "The Lecture System," published in Eyes and Ears (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862), p. 105.

⁵⁸Tribune, September 20, 1854.

⁵⁹Tribune, October 19, 1855.

⁶⁰Tribune, October 12, 1858.

⁶¹Tribune, September 9, 1859.

⁶²A good account of Melville's lecturing, 1857-1860, is given by John H. Birss, in "Travelling, a New Lecture by Herman Melville," New England Quarterly, VII (December, 1934), 725-728.

⁶³Mrs. H. M. Plunkett, Josiah Gilbert Holland (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), pp. 46-48. A typical view of the business end of lecturing about this time is found in Bayard Taylor's letter to Isaac I. Hayes, March 1, 1856; see Unpublished

lyceum lecture. Indeed, the vogue grew to such a point that one writer, in explaining why Artemus Ward became a lecturer, wrote as follows:

Of late years all Americans who have made a name have deemed it their duty to straightway enter the lecture field, whether that name was gained from being a writer, a soldier, a swindler, or an assassin. Dollars and increased notoriety are in that path. The next morning after a railroad accident has got a man's name conspicuously into an Associated Press dispatch, he puts himself in communication with the lecture committees.⁶⁴

During the middle 1850's, another change gradually took place in the lecture system. This was the opening up of the platform to all controversial topics, especially political issues. In the earlier fifties, as one writer put it, "Divisive subjects, such as slavery, or distinctly political topics, were tabooed. . . ."⁶⁵ The committees arranging courses expected the speakers to observe what Holmes called "the laws of the lecture-room,"⁶⁶ where, he felt, "there is an implied contract to keep clear of doubtful matters."⁶⁷ Slowly, however, during the decade, strictures disappeared; and, in the words of G. W. Curtis, "As the boy's tune whistled itself, so the Lyceum gradually, not roughly, but by general consent, became an open platform."⁶⁸ No very definite date can be assigned for this development, but it seems to have begun by the middle of the decade; by 1861 it was nearly complete. In that year, Curtis wrote in his "Easy Chair" page in Harper's:

Letters of Bayard Taylor, ed. J. R. Schultz (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1937), pp. 46-47.

⁶⁴Kansas Magazine, I (February, 1872), 121.

⁶⁵George H. Haynes, Charles Sumner (Philadelphia: G. W. Jacobs and Co., 1890), p. 92.

⁶⁶Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Professor at the Breakfast Table (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), pp. 145-146.

⁶⁷Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Professor at the Breakfast Table, p. 155.

⁶⁸Harper's Monthly, XL (May, 1870), 921. See also, "Lounger Page," Harper's Weekly, III (January 29, 1859), 66: "The Lounger has been interested in the study of the Lyceum and the lecture-system for some time, and the result of his extended and careful observation is that the Lyceum has constantly grown in earnestness and freedom of thought and discussion."

Three of four years ago the Easy Chair suggested that a Political Lyceum would be a very useful thing. . . . But there is no need of any such separation between the departments of the Lyceum now. It is all political, and political because politics have been now visibly swept up into the realm of morals, where, properly considered, they always are.⁶⁹

This liberalizing tendency went forward steadily for a decade, until in 1871 an English writer observed:

The lyceum became gradually an open platform. . . . Now the lyceum platform is absolutely free. No subject is tabooed.⁷⁰

All these developments tended to set up the three conditions which, as Moses Coit Tyler pointed out, were necessary to coax first-rate men into the lecture field:

(1) Lecturing must be a respected profession; (2) there must be pecuniary inducements; (3) and there must be freedom of utterance.⁷¹

These conditions, and others which fostered the movement, were abundantly fulfilled in the late 1850's; as a result, the lecture system was exceptionally flourishing.⁷²

Even at the height of its popularity, there were those who declared each year that the lyceum was on the decline;⁷³ as Dr. Holland put it in 1865, "For the last fifteen years the downfall of what has been popularly denominated 'The Lecture System' has been confidently predicted. . . ."⁷⁴ However, as another

⁶⁹George William Curtis, "Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, XXIV (January, 1861), 266-269.

⁷⁰"Lyceums and Lecturing in America," All the Year Round, n.s., V (March 4, 1871), 321.

⁷¹Moses Coit Tyler, "How They Manage Their Lectures in England," p. 99.

⁷²See James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius (New York: G. W. Dillingham Co., 1900), p. 55: It was in "the decade preceding the Civil War" in which "the early lyceum obtained its largest development."

⁷³See Dr. George W. Bethune's "Lectures and Lecturers," Tribune, January 12, 1859, in which the speaker predicts the decline of the system. A reply to Bethune is found in Harper's Weekly, III (January 29, 1859), 66. The New York Herald was always predicting the end of the lyceum. See its editorial of September 13, 1858, in which appear such terms as "a bastard literature," "Quackery," "imported charlatanism," "trash," "flimsy trickery," and "peripatetic humbugs."

⁷⁴Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland, Plain Talks on Familiar Subjects, p. 309.

contemporary observed, "The agreeable facts are annually brought forward, but the Lyceum perversely refuses to stop."⁷⁵

As might be expected, the coming of the Civil War made great changes. At first, however, the effect was not so much to reduce the number of lectures as to alter their nature: the war became almost the sole topic in the lyceum. In the early days of the war, one journalist noted:

The Lyceum, or our system of popular lectures, will doubtless feel the pressure of the time. But it is understood that in most of the cities the usual course will be given. The lecturers ought to remember that the times are earnest, and that they should speak to the times.⁷⁶

And from "The Editor's Easy Chair" in Harper's Monthly for the same year, came the following observation:

The Lyceum this winter has but one subject, as the newspapers, and common conversation have. The lectures treat of the rebellion in a multitude of aspects; and there is no doubt that they will be of the utmost service in giving a more precise form to the faith of honest, patriotic hearts.⁷⁷

Anthony Trollope, in his North America (1862), gave a similar picture of the lyceum. Of the several lectures which he described, all were "on the subject of the War."⁷⁸

For more than three years this situation continued. In 1863, a student of the times commented:

The demand for good lecturers was never greater, and some of the most eminent and popular, such as Mr. Beecher, Mr. Chapin, and Mr. Bayard Taylor, return from their European absence refreshed and inspired. Inevitably and happily, the profound interest of the time will hardly suffer any speaker to wander far from some aspect of the condition of the country.⁷⁹

⁷⁵Harper's Weekly, IV (November 10, 1860), 707. See also Harper's Monthly, XXIV (January, 1861), 266: "The Lyceum, or the lecture-course, seems to hold fast to public favor. The wise men who foretold its inevitable decline are every winter put in the wrong, but emerge every spring with a most cheerful and vigorous pooh! pooh!"

⁷⁶Harper's Weekly, V (November 2, 1861), 690.

⁷⁷Harper's Monthly, XXIV (January, 1861), 267.

⁷⁸Anthony Trollope, North America (New York: Harper and Bros., 1862), pp. 220 ff. Trollope makes some very pertinent remarks on American lecturing.

⁷⁹Harper's Weekly, VII (October 31, 1863), 691. The system continued strong into 1864. See Harper's Monthly, XXVIII (February, 1864), 420: "The friend who asks the Easy Chair how it

However, toward the end of the conflict, the platform began to suffer. This was owing, first of all, to the lack of variety in topics. Furthermore, a number of leading figures, Gough, Beecher, and Browne, had gone to England; and others, such as Thomas Meagher and T. W. Higginson, were in the army. The increasingly unsettled financial condition of the country likewise made the engagement of speakers uncertain and unsatisfactory. All these conditions weakened the lecture system; however, Higginson was perhaps overstating the decline when, in 1867, he wrote in the Atlantic:

. . . . an institution which was once more potent than all of these [schools, periodicals, music, and pictures] for the intellectual training of the adult American has almost ceased to exist in its original form. The engrossing excitement of public affairs has nearly abolished the old "Lyceum," and put a political orator in the lecturer's place.⁸⁰

The end of the war marked the beginning of a new period in American life. How different the post-war years were from the pre-war decade has been noted by such contrasting, yet intuitive, observers as Henry Adams⁸¹ and Mark Twain.⁸² It was a new atmosphere; but it was again an atmosphere in which the lecture platform could flourish. As one writer put it, "the public mind, released from the long strain of the southern conflict, was hungry

fares with the Lyceum in this engrossing war, will be glad to hear that it was never so flourishing and promising as it is now." A. C. Cole seems to be accurate when he states, in The Irrepressible Conflict, p. 367: "The lyceum, adapting itself to the new conditions, but catering to a dwindling public, added patriotic propaganda to its educational function."

⁸⁰T. W. Higginson, "A Plea for Culture," Atlantic Monthly, XIX (January, 1867), 30.

⁸¹Henry Adams, Education of Henry Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), p. 237: Speaking of his return to America with his father in 1868: "Had they been Tyrian traders of the year B.C. 1000, landing from a galley fresh from Gibraltar, they could hardly have been stranger on the shore of a world, so changed from what it had been ten years before."

⁸²S. L. Clemens and C. D. Warner, The Gilded Age (New York: Harper and Bros., 1915), pp. 176-177: "The eight years in America from 1860 to 1868 uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations." Of course, this paragraph may be the work of Warner, with Clemens' approval.

for this form of entertainment and instruction. . . .⁸³ Economic conditions improved in the North at least, and the further extension of the railroads again opened new fields. Moreover, as Mary A. Livermore later pointed out,⁸⁴ a large number of lively issues remained on which audiences were eager to hear discussion, and the barriers to such discussion had been removed. All these factors went together to produce a period rivalling the 1850's in brilliance on the lecture platform. It was described thus in the New York Tribune of November 4, 1876:

During the eight years which succeeded the war no class of entertainment was so liberally supported or so universally in demand [as the lecture]. From the large cities, where men most distinguished in science and literature spoke before audiences of high culture, to the smallest New-England village, where the church was the hall and the clergyman the orator--everywhere the lecture platform was one of the chief instruments of amusement and instruction.

But the development most responsible for this flowering of the lecture system in the seventies, was the establishment of the lecture bureau. Credit for organizing the first bureau has commonly been given to James Redpath.⁸⁵ As a matter of fact, two other organizations were started earlier than Redpath's. Some time prior to 1855, the Associated Western Literary Societies had been organized in Detroit. As Hubert H. Hoeltje has described it,⁸⁶ this loose confederation of local lecture committees served

⁸³John Haynes Holmes, Life and Letters of Robert Collyer (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1917), p. 81.

⁸⁴Mary A. Livermore, "Twenty-Five Years on the Lecture Platform," The Arena, VI (August, 1892), 263-265.

⁸⁵The misunderstanding seems to have begun with Major J. B. Pond's statement in Eccentricities of Genius, p. 540. It was further carried on by Charles F. Horner, The Life of James Redpath (New York: Barse and Hopkins, 1926), p. 129, where Redpath's is spoken of as the "first lyceum bureau." The error is repeated by Anna L. Curtis, in "A Brief History of the Lyceum," Who's Who in the Lyceum, ed. A. Augustus Wright (Philadelphia: Pearson Bros., 1906), p. 28; and by Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America, p. 239.

⁸⁶Hubert H. Hoeltje, "Notes on the History of Lecturing in Iowa, 1855-1885," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XXV (January, 1927), 120-131. A somewhat similar association, called by the writer "the first ever formed in the United States," is said to have been formed in Toledo, Ohio, in 1862; see E. P. Powell, "The Rise and Decline of the New England Lyceum," New England Magazine, XI (February, 1895), 730.

somewhat the purpose of a bureau in arranging itineraries for lecturers. From 1865 to 1867, the secretary was Edwin Lee Brown, of Chicago. When Brown proved unsatisfactory in 1867, G. L. Torbert, of Dubuque, Iowa, was elected to the office.⁸⁷ The A.W.L.S., of course, did not work to promote lecturers, but merely aimed at synchronizing dates for the benefit of the member societies.

The first lecture bureau to act as agent for lyceum speakers on a percentage basis appears to have been the American Literary Bureau, founded in New York in 1866. Colonel Edward G. Parker⁸⁸ and James Knowles Medbery were the organizers, but the former soon disappeared from the picture. Medbery, a brother-in-law of Steele MacKaye, was literary editor of the Round Table.⁸⁹ The bureau seems to have grown out of an idea expressed in an editorial in that magazine, November 3, 1866.⁹⁰ It is clear from its first advertisement that the engagement of lecturers was only one of its functions; it also marketed manuscripts, and performed other literary services.⁹¹ During the summer of 1869, it advertised extensively in the New York Tribune, and the editor commended the bureau highly:

Lecture Committees, Lyceums, and other organizations seeking the services of lecturers for the coming season will find that the American Literary Bureau . . . affords a trustworthy and convenient means of perfecting their arrangements. The Bureau is now in its fourth year, and is supplying lecturers over the whole country.⁹²

⁸⁷ Torbert arranged Emerson's lectures in the West in 1867; see Emerson's Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Ralph L. Rusk (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), V, 537-538; 498. Higginson also refers to Torbert's activities; see Part of a Man's Life, p. 77.

⁸⁸ Parker was editor of The Golden Age of American Oratory (Boston: Whittemore, Niles, and Hall, 1857).

⁸⁹ Facts about Medbery may be found in Percy MacKaye, Epoch: Life of Steele MacKaye (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927), I, 67, 112, 125, and 230. He died in France of lung trouble, August 31, 1873.

⁹⁰ Round Table, IV (November 3, 1866), 219-220.

⁹¹ Round Table, IV (December 29, 1866), 366.

⁹² Tribune, September 11, 1869. T. W. Higginson, in "The American Lecture-System," p. 52, states that Medbery "has made engagements for nearly thirty lecturers during the past winter in eight different states of the Union."

The list of lecturers given in the advertisement in the same issue of the Tribune does indeed include a great number of the leading platform figures. A publication of the bureau, the American Literary Magazine and Lecture Season, issued in 1871, gives an excellent picture of the organization's activities.⁹³

During 1870, the American Literary Bureau absorbed the Associated Western Literary Societies, thus providing a Chicago branch;⁹⁴ and some time before 1871, the bureau absorbed the Williams Bureau of Boston (founded in 1869),⁹⁵ furnishing a branch in that city. It was still going strong in 1876, with C. S. Carter as President;⁹⁶ after this date, no more is known of it.

Though other bureaus were earlier in the field,⁹⁷ Redpath's was nevertheless soon the most prominent. The founder, as biographer of John Brown and as journalist during the Civil War, had gained a wide acquaintanceship among reformers.⁹⁸ When he started his bureau in 1868, he already possessed this advantage; and with his own flair for reading the interests of the times,⁹⁹

⁹³Published in New York, by the American Literary Bureau. On page 12 appears a history of the founding of the bureau. The list of talent includes one hundred thirty-four lecturers, twenty-three readers, and twenty musical combinations.

⁹⁴Hubert H. Hoeltje, "Notes on the History of Lecturing in Iowa, 1855-1885," p. 131.

⁹⁵Anna L. Curtis, "A Brief History of the Lyceum," p. 28. See American Literary Magazine and Lecture Season, p. 14, for an article from the Boston Journal about Williams.

⁹⁶Tribune, November 4, 1876, contains an interview with Carter on the state of the lecture business.

⁹⁷Other bureaus sprang up quickly. For example, Olive Logan announced that she could be engaged only through the Author's Union, New York; see Tribune, October 18, 1872. Tribune, August 13, 1870, contains advertisements for the American Literary Bureau, Redpath and Falls, and National Lecture Bureau, New York.

⁹⁸Charles F. Horner, The Life of James Redpath, p. 130. This volume is somewhat sketchy as far as the lyceum is concerned.

⁹⁹Typical testimony as to Redpath's part in suggesting topics and speakers, is given by Mary A. Livermore, in "Twenty-Five Years on the Lecture Platform," p. 263: "He arranged all details at the beginning, made the way easy, and understanding the popular taste, as I did not, suggested lecture topics, made engagements, and was the most indefatigable of agents."

and with the carefully systematic administration of his partner, George B. Fall,¹⁰⁰ he soon made his bureau the foremost in the country. Redpath displayed considerable daring in the offering of high fees,¹⁰¹ but his courses were nearly always huge successes. The same was true of his successor, Major J. B. Pond, who bought the firm in 1874. Pond's Eccentricities of Genius, although not always perfectly trustworthy, gives a racy picture of many of the leading figures of this later period.

The convenient location of Redpath's office in Boston made it a favorite gathering place for the lecturing fraternity.¹⁰² Somewhat later, Pond's office in New York assumed a similar importance.¹⁰³

The establishment of lecture bureaus had an immediate and immense effect. Said Major Pond:

Since the establishment of the bureau, the number of lectures given in the United States has increased ten-fold, chiefly under the impulse which it gave to the system. It has more than quadrupled the number of lectures that were given in New England when it was organized.¹⁰⁴

If the increase in New York was not so great as in more remote localities, nevertheless even there was felt the stimulation of the enterprising agents' active promotion and advertising. The Star Course in Steinway Hall, Evenings Up Town, the Galaxy Course, Redpath's Lyceum Course, the Fifth Avenue Lecture Course, and the City Lecture Course are examples of series arranged by lecture bureaus; in addition, the agents supplied speakers for other courses.

On the other hand, though the immediate effect was stimulating, some observers declared that in a few years the bureaus

¹⁰⁰ Routine details were handled by Fall, according to James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, p. 542.

¹⁰¹ Redpath was the first to offer \$1000 for a single lecture--to Henry Ward Beecher; see Charles F. Horner, The Life of James Redpath, p. 142.

¹⁰² Charles F. Horner, The Life of James Redpath, p. 135. For a chatty report on this point, see "An Hour at the Lecture Bureau," Every Saturday, n.s., II (January 28, 1871), 75.

¹⁰³ For a picture of Pond's office and anecdotes of those who visited it, see Pond's article, "The Lyceum," Cosmopolitan, XX (April, 1896), 595 ff.

¹⁰⁴ James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, p. 537.

impaired the lyceum. Most outspoken, perhaps, was Dr. J. G. Holland, editor of Scribner's. In an article, "Lecture-Brokers and Lecture-Breakers," published in March, 1871, Holland blamed the bureaus for the sharp decline in receipts reported by committees.¹⁰⁵ He gave two reasons: the added expense of the bureau's commission made lecturers' fees higher; and the agents pushed cheap men, putting respectable men on a level with "literary jesters and mountebanks," lowering the tone of the lyceum.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, there were many who objected to what one writer called "the customary clap-trap of agents, whose maxim is, 'The public must have a certain amount of humbug you know!'"¹⁰⁷ Even Major Pond admitted that abuses arose from the bureaus' efforts to sell an entire course in a block.¹⁰⁸

The mood of the public, released from the strain of war, and the disposition of agents to promote profitable lecturers, combined to emphasize more strongly on the lyceum platform the element of entertainment. "Fun is the fashion," said the Tribune.¹⁰⁹ A new crop of entertaining lyceum figures appeared--the comic lecturers. The humorous lecture had begun just before the war with Artemus Ward, and had grown in favor with Petroleum V. Nasby; but it was in the post-war years that audiences welcomed such

¹⁰⁵Local committees occasionally rebelled against the agents. A good example is the Chicago society described in an article in the Atlantic Monthly, XXXIX (April, 1877), 488. The writer comments on this group's success, that "it seems to me a very effective and much needed criticism on the expensive and in great part valueless system which the 'lecture bureaus' have gradually succeeded in fastening on the public."

¹⁰⁶Scribner's Monthly, I (March, 1871), 560-561. Holland continued his attack in "Star-lecturing," Scribner's, VIII (May, 1874), 110-111.

¹⁰⁷"Tyndall's Lectures in New York," Popular Science, II (February, 1873), 499. Another who felt the bureaus ruined the lecture field was Mark Twain; see Mark Twain in Eruption, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York: Harper and Bros., 1940), p. 216.

¹⁰⁸James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, pp. 300-301. For a satire on bureaus for selling talent "at so much per head," see "Popular Lectures," Galaxy, IX (March, 1870), 418-420.

¹⁰⁹Tribune, February 1, 1872. Hubert H. Hoeltje, in studying the audience in Iowa immediately after the war, noted this same mood. "It did not want to be instructed, it no longer wanted to be reformed. It wanted, if anything, to be entertained." Hubert H. Hoeltje, "Notes on the History of Lecturing in Iowa, 1855-1885," p. 98.

stars as Josh Billings, Mark Twain, A. Minor Griswold, and Eli Perkins. This "large infusion of the purely humorous element" which, Curtis remarked in Harper's,¹¹⁰ changed the lyceum after the war, was merely one indication of audiences' increasing demands for entertainment.

A little later than the influx of humorists was the invasion of the lyceum field by the women. During the 1850's, women had begun to appear as lecturers, but only the boldest and most militant. In Kate Field, Lillian S. Edgerton, and Olive Logan, to mention a few examples, a new type appeared on the scene--thoroughly feminine and attractive young ladies. A writer in All the Year Round described the situation:

Years ago no women were heard from the platform, except a few bold, masculine spirits, with lank hair and wearing spectacles, of uncertain age, who no more feared to speak in crowded halls than they did to appear on public thoroughfares in bloomer trousers. A very different state of things exists now. . . . You may now see brisk and airy damsels, not disdaining Grecian bends and chignons, who hold you rapt for an hour of sprightly elocution, bright sallies of wit, sharp satire, and apt illustration.¹¹¹

"Demand for Eloquent Female Speakers Increasing," declared an advertiser in the New York Tribune, with an offer to help a female prepare a lecture on Woman's Suffrage.¹¹² "Ladies have the lyceum almost wholly to themselves just now in New-York," says a squib in the same paper, December 4, 1870. Perhaps the new emphasis upon the ladies' appearance¹¹³ was a further indication of the desire for entertainment in the lyceum.

A third invasion of the New York lecture platform was that made in the early seventies by English celebrities. Although lecturing in England was much less developed than in the United

¹¹⁰Harper's Monthly, XLVI (December, 1872), 137.

¹¹¹"Lyceums and Lecturing in America," p. 321.

¹¹²Tribune, January 4, 1869. A charming picture of this new young lady type of lecturer is given in the character of Miss Verena Tarrant in Henry James' The Bostonians. This book, incidentally, gives an excellent glimpse of the lecture field in the middle seventies.

¹¹³See the mock newspaper reports of the lecture by "Miss K. Bellona Belladonna," in Scribner's Monthly, I (April, 1871), 675.

States,¹¹⁴ there were numbers of British notables whom audiences were eager to hear; lecture bureaus sought their services;¹¹⁵ and many were willing to follow the lead of Thackeray and Dickens. Thomas Hughes and A. J. Mundella arrived in 1870-71; Edmund Yates, James Anthony Froude, George MacDonald, Miss Emily Faithfull, Professor John Tyndall, Rev. Morley V. Punshon, Professor J. H. Pepper, in 1872-73; and Charles Bradlaugh, Wilkie Collins, Gerald Massey, Charles Kingsley, Edward Jenkins, and R. A. Proctor in 1873-74. "It has become quite the fashion for whoever is best and brightest in England to come to America," said the Tribune of February 18, 1874. Many of these visitors disappointed their audiences as lecturers,¹¹⁶ but they drew crowds interested in seeing a celebrity in the flesh.

This was indeed the heyday of the star lecturers. The journalists commented on it:

We have already grown so used to education from the platform that we may esteem it as one of the most intelligently popular characteristics of our English speaking age. Describe the period as one of newspapers, conventions, and lectures, and its countenance cannot be mistaken. . . .¹¹⁷

Writer after writer, with an air of originality, observed that the lecture system had become "an institution." Lyceum stars won national acclaim and garnered fortunes. While highest ranking stars earned such incomes as Beecher's (\$465,000 from lecturing)¹¹⁸ or Gough's (\$30,000 a year),¹¹⁹ even a second-rate figure, such as Parson C. C. McCabe, could earn \$100,000 in a decade with one

¹¹⁴An excellent comparison is given by Moses Coit Tyler, in "How They Manage Their Lectures in England," pp. 99 ff.

¹¹⁵It was the regret of Major Pond's life that he could not induce Gladstone to accept his proposition to lecture in America; see James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, pp. 348-349.

¹¹⁶This opinion is expressed in "English Lecturers," Galaxy, XXII (December, 1876), 866: "We have had a procession not small in quantity, and of quality the finest, of men who tried to be interesting, but with the exception of Tyndall their audiences have voted them dull."

¹¹⁷Tribune, December 18, 1869.

¹¹⁸Lionel G. Crocker, Henry Ward Beecher's Speaking Art (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937), p. 17.

¹¹⁹James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, p. 4.

lecture.¹²⁰ The prospect of generous reward drew into the field figures of such eminence as Senator Charles Sumner¹²¹ and unknown hopefuls such as Kate Field.¹²² Major J. B. Pond, thoroughly familiar with the financial side of the period, writes:

Such a thing as losing money on a big lecture course seemed impossible. . . . Everywhere the star course was the fad. . . . Lyceum treasuries were full, the people were liberal in their patronage, and the public satisfied. It was a marvellous intellectual movement, and that it no longer exists in this shape must be looked upon with sincere regret by those who watch the progress of the age.¹²³

But this post-war period of lyceum prosperity was not to last more than a decade. Even at its height, there were hints of its decay. Major Pond later placed the limits of its halcyon days as from 1871 to 1877.¹²⁴ By 1878, writers were mentioning the "golden age of lecturing" as a thing of the past.¹²⁵

A number of factors contributed to bring about this decline. One, of course, was the Panic of 1873. Although the number of courses in New York City did not diminish greatly,¹²⁶ the lecture system suffered badly throughout the nation. To quote a writer in the New York Tribune in 1876:

The prosperous condition of the country, to which was largely due the success of the lecture courses, was no longer general, and with the coming of "hard times," the smaller towns and cities refused to support the system. In the

¹²⁰The lecture was "The Bright Side of Life in Libby." Major James B. Pond, "Great Orators and the Lyceum," Cosmopolitan Magazine, XXI (July, 1896), 256.

¹²¹New York Times, quoted in London Times, November 3, 1870: "Senator Sumner, in a recent letter, speaks of his lecture for the coming winter as his only convenient means of eking out his somewhat inconvenient income. He can easily realize three times his senatorial salary. . . ."

¹²²Miss Field expresses herself somewhat naively in her diary: "Locke has made \$40,000 in one year's lecturing; and by his Nasby papers he has gained nothing but reputation. Such is life. I shall lecture." Lilian Whiting, Kate Field: A Record (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1899), pp. 200-201.

¹²³James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, pp. 542-543.

¹²⁴James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, p. 543.

¹²⁵"Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, LVII (June, 1878), 144.

¹²⁶In 1873-74, there were ten major courses in New York; in 1874-75, eight; and in 1875-76, nine.

larger cities, well-known lecturers still drew good audiences; the prices paid to them by the bureaus were not reduced, and the same rate of admission charged.¹²⁷

However, the weakening of the provincial lecture system necessarily reacted to some extent upon the metropolitan lyceum.

The lecture vogue "began to show weakness in 1874-75," Major Pond observed. "There were not enough good lecturers. The war-horses of the platform were disappearing."¹²⁸ The great figures of the 1850's had been born, for the most part, in the decade from 1809 to 1819; they were reaching the age of retirement. And no new generation of equally gifted men was forthcoming. An explanation of this fact, if not impossible, would certainly lead too far afield. But, as far as the lyceum is concerned, one obvious reason was that no great reform movement, such as abolition in the 1850's, challenged the men who came to their prime in the 1870's.¹²⁹ The fight for women's rights, as far as the lyceum went, lasted but a short time. The reform of labor conditions never gained great public support and was killed as a lecture topic by the Panic of 1873. The struggle between science and religion created a certain interest, but it did not catch the popular imagination as did the anti-slavery movement. The reform impulses of lyceum audiences had been exhausted by the strain of the war years.¹³⁰

¹²⁷Tribune, November 4, 1876. This article is extremely important in its full picture of the system at that time.

¹²⁸James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, pp. 543-544.

¹²⁹Is not this the point made by Van Wyck Brooks in his chapter on "The Younger Generation of 1870," New England: Indian Summer (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1940), pp. 184-203. For example, Mr. Brooks, echoing Henry Adams, writes: "The old culture had broken down, the old causes were dead and forgotten, and no new ideal had arisen to rally the minds of the younger men;" (p. 189).

¹³⁰Pond lists, as one of the factors in the lecture's decline, "the lessened interest in the discussion of disturbing public questions." (James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, p. 552). Miss Emily Faithfull, an English visitor, noted in 1884: "The American people have ceased to support the literary institutes as they did ten years ago, the vital questions which once occupied the attentions of speakers and audiences have received their solution, those that now arise are discussed elsewhere." (Emily Faithfull, Three Visits to America [Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1884], p. 80.) Unless he had some reform cause near his heart, a lecturer was not likely to continue lecturing after he had made

If no new great speakers were forthcoming, lecture bureaus still had to make engagements. Agents began to provide inferior talent to fill out courses. Mark Twain described this phase:

Meantime, speculators and money-makers had taken up the business of hiring lecturers, with the idea of getting rich at it. In about five years they killed that industry dead¹³¹

The large number of lecture-goers who merely wanted to see a celebrity would not support lectures by unknown figures; and men who had won fame in fields other than lecturing, frequently could not hold interest on the platform.

To meet the demand for entertainment, bureaus began to supply musical groups, readers, and ventriloquists. "Concerts and novelties were now called for in courses," Pond writes. "In consequence, the call for lectures was much diminished."¹³² As a result, "the intellectual character of the lyceum entertainments had been gradually falling."¹³³

Inevitably, this change brought the lyceum into closer competition with the stage, for which it had earlier been a sort of substitute. As prejudice against the theatre gave way, and as traveling facilities enabled theatrical troupes to reach more cities, the desire and the need for a substitute disappeared. Emily Faithfull, the English lecturer, noted the change:

The travelling theatrical company, however, now penetrates into regions where once the lecturer was the only joy--the one link with the great world beyond. If they clash, the play-actors have a full house and the lecturer stands dismayed before a row of empty benches.¹³⁴

money; witness the retirement from the platform of Mark Twain. As E. P. Powell, a veteran of these days, remarked, "When the moral purport of the lyceum was lost, its days were numbered." ("Rise and Decline of the New England Lyceum," New England Magazine, XI [February, 1895], 731.)

¹³¹Samuel L. Clemens, Mark Twain in Eruption, p. 220.

¹³²James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, p. 546.

¹³³James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, p. 547. Cf. "Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, LVII (June, 1878), 144: The editor notes that some have been complaining that "since 'lecture bureaus' have intervened between the lecturer and the lyceum, the good old 'course of lectures' has given way to a medley of music and ventriloquism and farce-acting and oratory. . . ."

¹³⁴Emily Faithfull, Three Visits to America, p. 81.

Undoubtedly, in New York, where prejudice against the theatre was less strong and where more drama was available to audiences,¹³⁵ the triumph of the stage over the platform took place earlier than in New England or the West. Probably lyceum audiences in the city had already deserted to the theatre before 1879, when, according to Major Pond's not always too accurate observations, a new factor entered:

The first hard blow that the lecture platform got was from the clear, humorous light operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. People went to hear them who would not previously go to the theatre. To a large extent they took the place of the lecturers in New England, causing public halls to be remodelled; and the curtain went up where previously it had been forbidden.¹³⁶

However much weight one attaches to this statement, there can be no doubt that as far as its amusement aspect went, the lyceum began in the late seventies to yield to the theatre.

Another factor in the decay of the system was the increased circulation of periodicals. The "mania of magazine starting" described by Frank Luther Mott,¹³⁷ and the gradual growth in circulation undoubtedly made the lyceum less important as a means of purveying the wonders of other lands or the discoveries of science. This is the explanation offered by one witness of the lyceum's decline, Joel Benton:

But the old Lecture Course has gone, with all who made it celebrated. Why did it go? the reader may ask. I think it went on account of the solidarity of the country, brought about by the general continuity and pulse-beat of the

¹³⁵A. Oakey Hall declared in a lecture in Boston: "Lectures have never been popular in New-York. There has been so much of French Drama and beer-garden, sought as a relief from the intense pressure of business excitement, that lectures are not looked upon with much favor" (*Times*, November 25, 1877). Hall was partly flattering his Boston audience, partly explaining his own unpopularity in New York. *The Nation*, VIII (April 8, 1869), 271-272, declares lectures have outlived their usefulness in "the larger towns," where "the theatre is no longer under ban"

¹³⁶James B. Pond, *Eccentricities of Genius*, p. 543. *H. M. S. Pinafore* was first given in New York in pirated version in January, 1879. The official version opened in December, 1879. Reviews do not indicate that it was recognized as more respectable than regular theatrical productions.

¹³⁷Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), III, 5. There were 700 magazines in 1865, 1,200 in 1870, and 2,400 in 1880.

telegraph and railroad, the ubiquity of the daily paper, the vast multiplication of periodicals, magazines, and books. . .
 . . .¹³⁸

On its educational side the lecture platform developed into a more systematic sort of adult education, the lectures being given in connection with a college and in planned courses. Such was the suggestion made in 1879 by a reader of Nation, who demanded "scholarly lectures, not 'popular dilutions.'"¹³⁹ The New York Tribune also noted this development:

It is perhaps significant of a coming change in the lecturing profession, that the desire of the public for such intellectual entertainment as is furnished by single discourses is giving way to a demand for courses upon subjects worthy of fuller treatment.¹⁴⁰

But lectures of this university extension sort appealed to a much smaller number than popular lectures, and the movement did not go far. An editorial in a New York paper, commenting in 1884 on the eclipse of the lyceum, remarked:

A few years ago the lecture lyceum was thought by many to be the great educator of the future, and all sorts of flowing predictions were made concerning it. But after a time it was discovered that the results did not justify these predictions, and the fickle public soon allowed the lecture system to sink into comparative obscurity. People got tired of being instructed when they simply wanted to be amused, and after a while even the most noted names failed to arouse more than a languid enthusiasm.¹⁴¹

The decline of the lecture's popularity may be recorded in statistical form by noting the number of lecture reports listed in the New York Tribune Index over a decade:

	<u>Number of lectures listed</u>
Index of 1875	107
Index of 1877	64
Index of 1880	54
Index of 1885	28
Index of 1887	8

If 1878 may be said to end the Public Lecture period, it may also be said to mark the beginning of a movement which

¹³⁸ Joel Benton, "Reminiscences of Eminent Lecturers," Harper's Monthly, XCVI (March, 1898), 615. Cf. James B. Pond, Eccentricities of Genius, p. 548.

¹³⁹ "A New Field for Lecturers," Nation, XXIX (October 30, 1879), 290; and (November 6, 1879), 305.

¹⁴⁰ Tribune, February 15, 1878.

¹⁴¹ Tribune, November 9, 1884.

continued the spirit of the lyceum--the Chautauqua. The first summer meetings at Lake Chautauqua, inspired by Rev. John Heyl Vincent and Mr. Lewis Miller, were held in 1874. In its origin, the movement was primarily religious, intended to improve the teaching in Sunday Schools.¹⁴² The list of lecturers and topics each year, however, showed a gradual broadening of the program,¹⁴³ until in 1878 the Chautauqua meetings included about the same elements of education, inspiration, and entertainment found in the lyceum. In 1878, too, the founding of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, a reading and study system which functioned during the winter as well, made the movement national in scope. Thus a third period in American platform speaking developed. The establishment of imitation Chautauqua camp meetings all over the land,¹⁴⁴ and the appearance of the traveling circuit in 1904 followed. The distinguished programs arranged by the parent organization make the movement of great importance.

The history of the American lecture, then, falls into these three clearly defined divisions--the American Lyceum, the Public Lecture period, and the Chautauqua. It is in the second of these that the historian of American literature will be chiefly interested. The American Lyceum may be relegated to the field of education; the Chautauqua movement may belong to the field of social history. But the picture of American letters will not be completely accurate until a more detailed consideration than has yet been given it, is devoted to the literary lecture of the years 1851 to 1878. Only after such a study can we realize what George William Curtis meant, when he wrote:

The lyceum of the last generation is gone, but it is not surprising that those who recall . . . its golden prime should cherish a kindly and regretful feeling for an

¹⁴² John H. Vincent, The Chautauqua Movement (Boston: Chautauqua Press, 1886); Jesse L. Hurlbut, The Story of Chautauqua (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921); Hugh A. Orchard, Fifty Years of Chautauqua (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1923); and Harper's Monthly, LIX (August, 1879), 350.

¹⁴³ See lists of lecturers and subjects in John H. Vincent, The Chautauqua Movement, pp. 260-280.

¹⁴⁴ An amusing picture of an early Chautauqua in South Dakota is given in Gay Maclaren, Morally We Roll Along (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1938), pp. 3-22.

institution which was so peculiarly American, and which served so well the true American spirit and American life.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵"Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, LXXIV (April, 1887), 824. Parts of this article are copied in Fred L. Pattee, The Feminine Fifties (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1940), p. 89, wrongly ascribed to the Utica Herald.

